

Drama

MYTH
an ancient story
involving gods or
heroes

THE SPIDER CURSE

Beware
the fury of
a powerful
goddess.



BY JENNIFER DIGNAN AND SPENCER KAYDEN



CHARACTERS

Circle the character you will play.

*Starred characters have major speaking parts.

Narrators 1, 2, and 3 (N1, N2, N3)

***Idmon**, a fabric dyer

***Athena**, goddess of wisdom, war, and the arts

***Arachne**, Idmon's daughter, a weaver

***Calista**, Arachne's friend

Merchant

Travelers 1, 2, and 3

Customers 1 and 2

Onlookers 1, 2, and 3

Nikolas, contest announcer

Crowd, a large group

Athena: Ah yes. There is her shield and . . . what is this?

Arachne: Her purple yarn. It is said that Athena weaves the most beautiful tapestries.

Athena: If you move your fingers like this, you will be able to better capture the curve of Athena's arm.

Arachne: Like this?

Athena: Yes, that's it.

Arachne: Thank you!

Athena: Hmmmm. My hair is slightly more golden than that, don't you think?

N1: Athena casts off her cloak, revealing her golden hair and shimmering silver gown.

Idmon (*gasping*): Athena!

N2: Idmon and Arachne drop to their knees.

Athena: Arachne, you are as gifted a weaver as any mortal I have seen.

Arachne: Thank you, goddess.

Athena: I would like to **nurture** your talent. Would you like me to be your teacher?

Arachne: More than anything!

Athena: So it shall be.



AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT:

How does Arachne bring about her own downfall?

SCENE 1

N1: High on a cliff above the Aegean Sea stands a simple clay house, home to Idmon and his daughter, Arachne.

N2: One evening, Athena comes to the house. She wears a cloak to hide her identity.

N3: Her gray eyes are striking.

Idmon: Welcome to my workshop.

N1: Athena admires Idmon's richly colored fabrics, which fill the room. One is the deep blue of a peacock, another the brilliant orange of the setting sun, another the delicate green of a tender spring leaf.

N2: She sees Arachne weaving at a loom in the corner.

Athena: And who is this?

Idmon: This is my 10-year-old daughter, Arachne. She loves nothing more than to weave. But alas, there has been no one to teach her since her mother died.

N3: Athena examines the tapestry Arachne is making.

Athena: What are you making, child?

Arachne: A picture of Athena.

SCENE 2

N3: A year later, Arachne and her friend Calista sit in



THE LOCATION Ancient Greece was made up of many different city-states. The land is mountainous, with hot, dry summers and rainy winters. The ancient Greeks' rich culture helped shape our world today. Democracy? Spiral staircases? The Olympics? Alarm clocks? You can thank the ancient Greeks for all of these.

the workshop at their looms.

N1: Calista looks over at Arachne's loom.

Calista: Those grapes are amazing. They look edible.

Arachne: Athena has taught me a lot about color. *(looking at Calista's loom)* Your picture is nice too.

Calista: You don't think this sword looks like a turkey leg?

Arachne *(giggling)*: No.

N2: Idmon walks in with a **merchant**.

Idmon: These tapestries are the work of the finest weavers in Greece.

N3: The merchant stops in front of a tapestry depicting a wild horse leaping into the sea.

Merchant: I can practically feel the splash of the water. Who wove this?

Arachne *(shyly)*: I did.

Merchant: It is a **marvel**. And this one, with the table overflowing with fruits and flowers?

Arachne *(blushing)*: That is also mine.

Merchant: I will buy both, as well as anything else made by this extraordinary young woman. She has clearly been blessed by Athena.



Looms like this one were used to make tapestries, rugs, clothes, and more.

N1: The merchant hands a sack of gold coins to Idmon.

N2: Calista squeezes her friend's hand. Arachne beams with pride.

SCENE 3

N3: As time passes, Arachne's fame spreads. People from far and wide come to see her work.

Traveler 1: Her weaving is extraordinary!

Traveler 2: Dazzling!

Traveler 3: What **artistry**!

Idmon *(proudly)*: My daughter was the pupil of Athena for five years.

Traveler 1: Of course. How else could a person become so skilled?

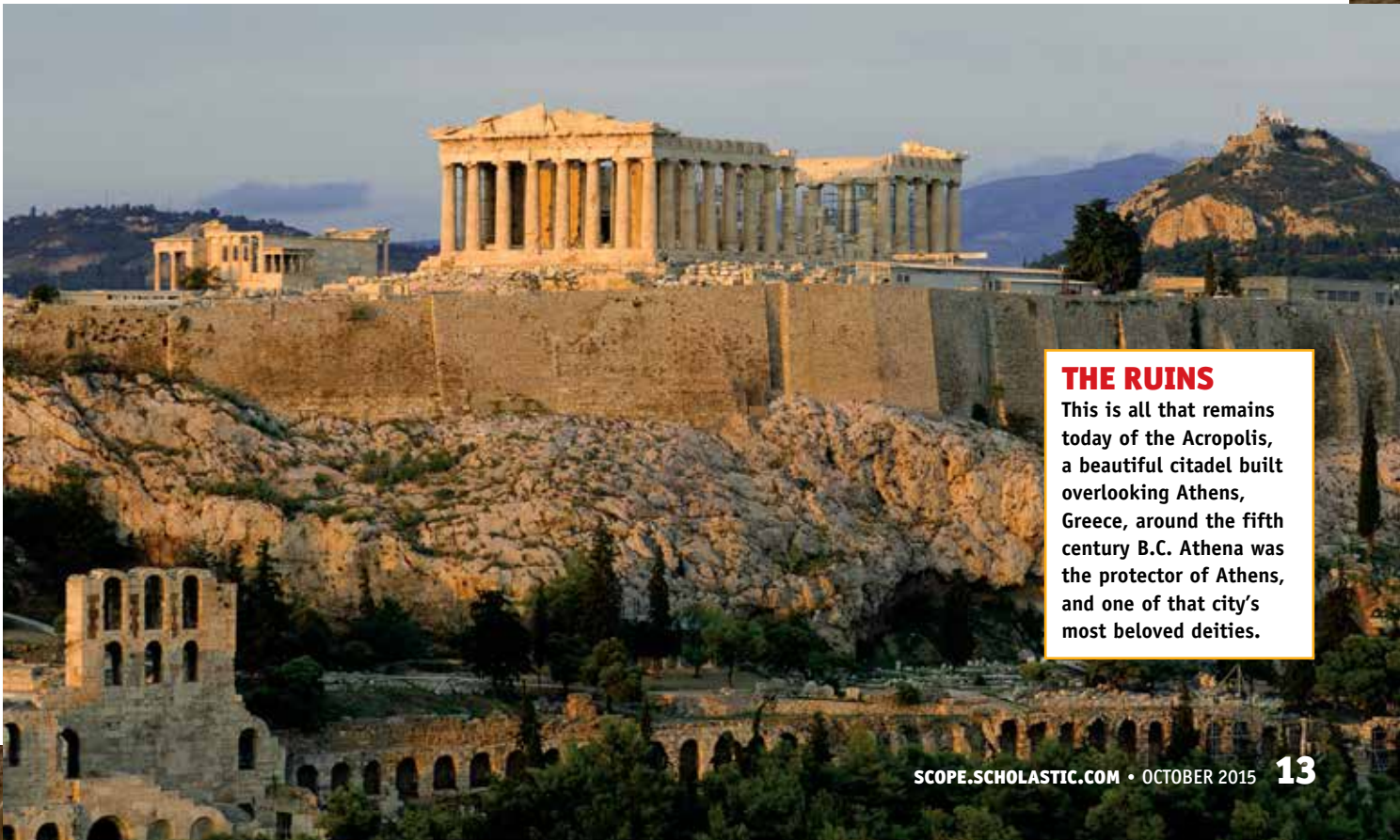
N1: Arachne rolls her eyes.

Arachne *(sarcastically)*: It's not like *I* had anything to do with it.

N2: Calista looks up in surprise.

Calista: Surely you are not denying what Athena has taught you.

Arachne: I'm just saying that when people look at my tapestries, all they talk about is Athena.



THE RUINS

This is all that remains today of the Acropolis, a beautiful citadel built overlooking Athens, Greece, around the fifth century B.C. Athena was the protector of Athens, and one of that city's most beloved deities.

Calista: I don't think that's true. People are impressed with your work—and they're impressed that Athena chose you as her student.

Arachne: Are they, though? People act like Athena just happened to choose me—like she might just as easily have chosen *you*.

N3: Calista blinks.

Arachne: I didn't mean it like that. I just meant—

Calista: I know what you meant. It's all right. But I would be careful if I were you.

Arachne: Careful?

Calista: The gods do not like it when their gifts are not appreciated.

SCENE 4

N1: Several months later, Idmon and Arachne are at a fair, selling their wares.

N2: A customer approaches.

Customer 1: You must be Arachne. I've heard all about your work—and truly, it is stunning.

Arachne: Thank you.

Customer 1: Have you seen the work of Lyra?

Arachne: Who?

Customer 1: Lyra is also a weaver. Quite talented, too.

Arachne (aside): Father, who is this Lyra? Is she better than I am?

Idmon: She must be excellent. This is not the first time I have heard her name.

Arachne (nervously): You must go find her and tell me if she is any good.

Idmon: Why are you upset?

Arachne: I am not upset!

Idmon: I am sure your tapestries are finer.

Customer 1: I would like to buy this tapestry here, for it is truly beautiful. Arachne, you must be so grateful to Athena.

Arachne: Grateful? Don't you think the reason I am so good might have something to do with *me*?

N3: Another nearby customer speaks up.

Customer 2: I would say so. Only Athena could do better.

Arachne: Enough about Athena already!

Idmon: We must show respect to the gods.

Arachne: Why? It's not like the gods are so perfect.

N1: Arachne's voice gets louder.

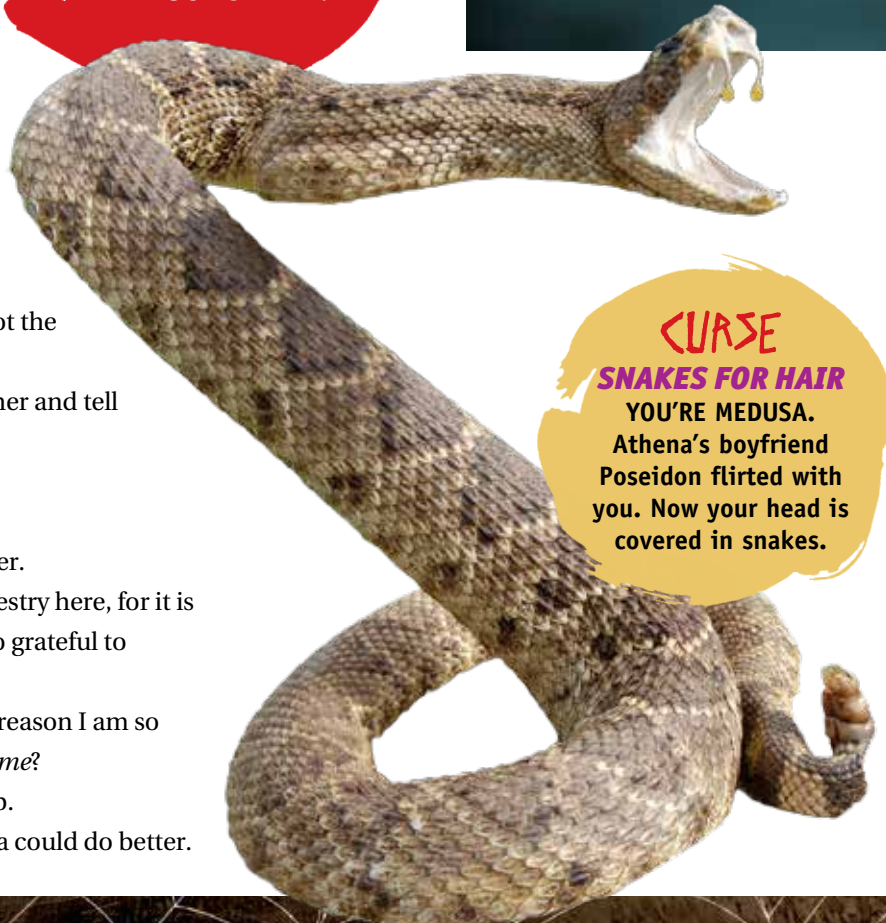
Arachne: Zeus has handed down some cruel punishments. *(louder)* Hera threw a baby off a mountain. *(louder still)* And as for your precious Athena? She turned some poor woman into a monster with snakes for hair!

Customer 1: It is not for us to question the gods.

Arachne: So we're just supposed to give them credit for all we do?

Idmon: How can you say that, after everything Athena has done for you?

A GALLERY OF
CURSES
HERE'S WHAT CAN
HAPPEN IF YOU MAKE
THE GODS MAD.



CURSE
SNAKES FOR HAIR
YOU'RE MEDUSA.
Athena's boyfriend
Poseidon flirted with
you. Now your head is
covered in snakes.

ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/GETTY IMAGES (SNAKE, ARROW)



CURSE

EAGLE ATTACK

YOU'RE PROMETHEUS.
You stole fire from the gods and gave it to humans. Now an eagle pecks out your liver every day.



Arachne: Who sits at my loom day after day? It's my hard work, my skill, my artistry—that's what makes me the best weaver in the world.

Customer 2: Like I said, Miss. Only Athena could do better.

Arachne: No. She could not.

Idmon and Customers: *Gasp!*

Customer 1: Good lady, the gods do not take kindly to mortals who make such boasts.

Arachne: I am not afraid. (*shouting*) Athena, I challenge you to a weaving contest!

N2: Arachne's words hang heavy in the air.

SCENE 5

N3: The next day, Calista rushes to the workshop.

Calista: You challenged a goddess to a contest?!

N1: Before Arachne can reply, Athena—disguised as an

old woman with scraggly white hair—walks in.

Idmon: Welcome, good woman. Come in.

N2: She gazes at the hanging tapestries.

Athena: How beautiful! Thanks be to Athena.

N3: Arachne rolls her eyes.

Athena: Now dear, you should not deny Athena the recognition she is due.

Arachne: What do you know about it?

Athena: With old age comes experience. Ask Athena to pardon you. Tell her how foolish you were to deny her hand in your gifts.

N1: Calista stares closely at the old woman's striking gray eyes.

Calista: Arachne, I really, really think you should listen to this woman.

Arachne (ignoring Calista): My gifts are my own. If Athena had the courage to answer my challenge, you would see that for yourselves—all of you!

Athena: As you wish!

N2: Her gray eyes flashing with anger, Athena sheds her disguise and rises to her full height. Idmon and Calista drop to their knees. Arachne becomes very still.

Athena: All right, Arachne, here are the terms of our contest: If you win, you will have the ridiculous glory that you seek. Clearly, it is not enough for you to be the greatest among **mortals**. But know this—

N3: As Athena speaks, the room shakes.

Athena: If you lose, you shall never weave again. History will remember you only as a foolish and **impudent** child—if history remembers you at all.

N1: Athena disappears in a flash.

SCENE 6

N2: Calista and Idmon stand with Arachne as two looms are set up side by side.

Idmon: Plead for forgiveness, and walk away from this contest.

Arachne: How would it look if I backed down now?

Calista: It would look like you came to your senses.





N3: Arachne squares her shoulders.

Arachne: I'm sure I have nothing to worry about.

N1: A panel of judges take their seats as onlookers chatter with excitement.

Onlooker 1: Arachne does not have a chance.

Onlooker 2: There is no denying her courage, though.

Onlooker 3: Nor her foolishness.

Nikolas: Welcome, welcome. We have come to witness a most unusual contest between a goddess and a mortal.

N2: The crowd claps as Athena and Arachne take their places behind their looms.

Nikolas: The tapestries will be judged according to their originality, beauty, and craftsmanship. Athena, Arachne: Please begin.

N3: The goddess and the girl plunge themselves into their work. For hours, neither utters a word nor even once looks up.

N1: Idmon and Calista watch nervously.

N2: Finally, the weavers' fingers come to rest.

Nikolas: Let us view the tapestries! Goddess Athena, show us your work.

N3: Athena holds up her tapestry.

Crowd: Oooohhhhh . . .

N1: Athena's tapestry portrays the gods and goddesses in all their glory. Woven throughout are tiny gold threads that cause the cloth to glow almost magically.

Onlooker 1: Exquisite!

Nikolas: Now, Arachne, please show us your tapestry.

N2: Arachne holds up her creation.

Crowd: Gasp!

Onlooker 2: Unbelievable!

Onlooker 3: What a fool!

Today, scientists refer to spiders as *arachnids*. Where do you suppose that name came from?

N3: Arachne has **depicted** the gods and goddesses at their worst, committing acts of cruelty, violence, and injustice. It is a vision of suffering and death. And yet, the tapestry is spectacular—every bit as magnificent as Athena's.

Idmon: Oh, Arachne!

Calista: What have you done?

N1: Athena's gray eyes narrow as they sweep over Arachne's tapestry. She takes two quick strides, rips the tapestry from Arachne's hands, and dashes it to the ground.

Athena: Stupid, stupid girl! I hope you enjoyed weaving that **monstrosity**, for it was the last thing you shall ever weave!

Arachne (*in barely a whisper*): What about the contest?

Nikolas: Let the judges discuss—

Athena: The contest is over! Arachne has lost.

N2: Tears slide down Arachne's face.

Arachne: But how can I live if I cannot weave?

N3: Athena considers Arachne for a moment.

Athena: I have changed my mind about your punishment. You *shall* weave . . . you shall weave for all eternity.

N1: With a loud crack, Arachne seems to vanish.

Idmon: Nooooooooo!

N2: Calista rushes to the spot where her friend had been standing and drops to her knees.

Calista: Ahhhhhhhhh!

N3: There, on the ground, is a tiny black spider.

EPILOGUE

N1: Six months later, Calista sits at a loom in Idmon's workshop, weaving.

N2: Pausing, she looks up at the corner of the room and smiles.

Calista: Arachne, your weaving still puts mine to shame.

N3: A tiny black spider slowly descends from its delicate web onto Calista's outstretched palm. ●

The story of Arachne reminds us of a modern-day tragedy: a famous athlete who destroyed himself in his quest for greatness. Read the article on the next page.



Is This the Most Hated Athlete of All Time?

Lance Armstrong was once a beloved sports hero—until the shocking truth came out. **BY ADEE BRAUN**

*Liar. Bully. Disgrace.
Cold-blooded.
Ruthless.*

These are just some of the many words that have been used to describe him. No, he is not a murderer or a dictator or even one of the Dance Moms.

He is cyclist Lance Armstrong—once one of the most adored athletes in America. Fans would wait for hours during his races just to see him flash by on his bike. He starred in commercials and smiled from magazine covers and cereal boxes. He attended glamorous parties and dated a rock star. He even hung out with the president. He was living a dream life.

Then it all came crashing down.

How did Lance Armstrong go from being one of the most admired athletes the world has ever seen to being one of the most **reviled**? It turns out, he was hiding a dark secret: He was a cheater.

Stronger and Faster

From the moment he could walk, Armstrong seemed to be a natural athlete. In his hometown of Plano, Texas, he excelled at football, swimming, and running. But cycling was where he really shone. His coaches expected great things from him, and he didn't disappoint. By the age of 21, he was cycling for the U.S. Olympic team. But it wasn't until he won the most competitive race in world cycling—the Tour de France—that he became a superstar.

The Tour de France is a grueling race that



lasts for three weeks and stretches across more than 2,000 miles (that's the distance from L.A. to Chicago) of some very mountainous terrain. Winning the race for the first time in 1999 propelled Armstrong to stardom. When people found out that he had survived cancer two years earlier, his popularity grew. Not only was he a champion athlete, but he was also an inspiration to people around the world. Big sponsors like Nike paid him millions of dollars. The cancer research organization that he started, the Livestrong Foundation, raised more than \$500 million and turned yellow rubber Livestrong bracelets into a hot fashion trend.

What few could have imagined was that Armstrong, the dazzling hero, was a fraud. For years, he had been taking performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) to make his body leaner and stronger so he could race faster and longer. This is known as doping and it is against the rules in cycling.

Dangerous Drugs

Almost all competitive athletes try to gain an edge. They buy the best gear, hire expensive trainers, and follow punishing diet and fitness regimens. (At the ancient Greek Olympics, athletes feasted on the manure of wild boars because they thought it would help them win.)

Some athletes choose to go further in their quest for greatness, crossing both moral and legal lines into the world of doping. PEDs give competitors an unfair advantage. They are also extremely dangerous. Doping has been linked

to cancer, stroke, heart attack, depression, and suicide.

Doping scandals have **blighted** many sports, including baseball, football, and Olympic track and field. But doping is especially **rampant** in international cycling. Armstrong would later say that if he wanted to stay on top, he had no choice but to take PEDs.

An Unstoppable Force

During his years of doping, Armstrong became an unstoppable force. From 1999 to 2005, he won the Tour de France a record seven times. His fans were dazzled by his superhuman strength and discipline. Some people, though, were convinced that he had to be doping—and said so publicly.

Armstrong met each accusation with furious denials, and he used his status as a celebrity and cancer survivor to humiliate and silence his accusers. Meanwhile, he had a system for doping that was staggering in both its sophistication and **connivance**. He enlisted helpers to hide PEDs in white paper lunch bags and sneak them into his hotel room during races. He had his trainer



ARE THEY ALL CHEATERS? Lance Armstrong and other cyclists have stated that doping was so common in cycling that to be competitive, they had no choice but to dope. But is that really a valid reason to break the rules?



FALL FROM THE TOP

Lance Armstrong's reputation has been completely destroyed and he has been banned from cycling forever. Does he deserve what has happened to him?

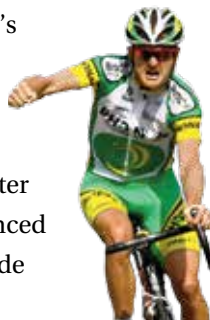
inject the drugs into his arm and dump the syringes 60 miles away. If a drug tester came snooping, he dodged the test by dropping out of the race.

Armstrong wasn't content risking only his own reputation and health, however. In cycling, a team leader—like Armstrong—is supported by a team of other cyclists who ride alongside him, doing everything they can to help the leader win. Armstrong insisted that his teammates use PEDs as well, informing them that anyone who refused to dope would be kicked off the team. Nobody refused.

Bullying became Armstrong's most effective defensive **tactic**. If a journalist wrote a story accusing him of doping, Armstrong sued. If a cyclist suggested he was using banned substances, he destroyed that cyclist's reputation by spreading untrue rumors.

Armstrong's tactics were so successful that he felt invincible. His adoring fans stayed by his side, and in 2008, three years after retiring from professional cycling, he announced that he was returning to go for another Tour de

Floyd Landis won the Tour de France in 2006 but was stripped of his title after he failed a drug test.



France win. His secret, it seemed, was safe.

But no secret can stay hidden forever.

In Ruins

Armstrong's unraveling began in 2010, when former teammate Floyd Landis came forward about the doping on Armstrong's team. As usual, Armstrong responded by spreading vicious lies, hoping to **discredit** Landis.

This time, however, **tenacious** federal agents decided to launch an aggressive investigation. Armstrong tried to shut down the investigation, even calling on powerful friends in Washington, D.C., for help. But it was too late. Dozens of former teammates, trainers, and others came forward with **appalling** stories of Armstrong's cheating. On October 10, 2012, the United States Anti-Doping Agency released a shocking 1,000-page report that revealed, in graphic detail, how Armstrong had fooled the world. He was quickly stripped of all seven Tour de France titles, forced to return the bronze Olympic medal he won in 2000, and banned from cycling forever. He was sued for millions of dollars, his sponsors dropped him, and he stepped down as the head of Livestrong.

Still, it took more than a year for Armstrong to come clean to the public. It wasn't until January 2013, in a televised interview with Oprah Winfrey, that he finally

admitted he had lied about doping. Since then, Armstrong has apologized to those who were most gravely hurt by his schemes. His victims, though, have been slow to forgive—and they have good reason to question his

sincerity.

Today, even as Armstrong faces further legal action, he's working to get his lifetime ban from cycling lifted. He also believes that his Tour de France titles should be restored.

As for the doping? He says, "If you take me back to 1995 . . . I'd probably do it again." ●

WRITING CONTEST

If you're invincible, it means you can never be defeated. In what ways did Arachne and Lance Armstrong believe they were invincible? How did that lead to their downfalls? Answer both questions in a short essay. Send it to **INVINCIBLE CONTEST**. Five winners will each get *Zen and the Art of Faking It* by Jordan Sonnenblick. See page 2 for details.



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